THE TWO LAST SPEECHES OF THOMAS WENTWORTH LATE EARLE OF STRAFFORD, AND DEPUTY OF IRELAND.

The one in the Tower, the other on the Scaffold on Tower-hill, *May* 12. 1641.

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JUNE 1, 1916

THE EARLE OF STRAFFORDS SPEECH

In the Tower to the Lords, before he went to execution,

RIght Honourable, and the reſt, you are now come to convey me to my death; I am willing to dy, which is a thing no more than all our Predeceſſors have done, and a debt that our Poſterity muſt in their due time diſcharge; which ſince it can bee no way avoyded, it ought the leſſe to be feared; for that which is common to all, ought not to bee intollerable to any: It is the Law of Nature, the tribute of the fleſh, a remedy from all worldly cares and troubles, and to the truly penitent, a perfect path to bleſſednesſe. And there is but one death, though ſeverall wayes unto it: mine is not naturall, but enforced by the Law and Juſtice: it hath beene ſaid, that the Lawes vex only the meaner ſort of people, but the mighty are able to withſtand them: it is not ſo with me, for to the Law I ſubmit my ſelfe, and confeſſe that I receive nothing but juſtice: for he that politickly intendeth good to a Commonweale, may be called a juſt man, but he that practiſeth either for his owne profit, or any other ſiniſter ends, may bee well termed a delinquent perſon; neither is delay in puniſhment any priviledge for pardon. And moreover, I ingenuouſly confeſſe with *Cicero*, That the death of the bad is the ſafety of the good that be alive.

Let no man truſt either in the favour of his Prince, the friendſhip and conſanguinity of his Peeres, much leſſe in his own wiſdome and knowledge, of which I ingenuouſly confeſſe I have beene too confident. Kings, as they are men before God, ſo they are Gods before men; and I may ſay with a great man once in this Kingdome, *Had I ſtrived to obey my God as faithfully, as I ſought to honour my King fraudulently, I had ſtood, and not fallen.* Moſt happy and fortunate is that Prince, who is as much for his juſtice feared, as for his goodneſſe beloved: For the greater that Princes are in power above other, the more they ought in vertue to excell other; and ſuch is the royall Soveraigne whom I lately ſerved.

For my Peeres, the correſpondence that I had with them during my proſperity, was to me very delightfull and pleaſing, and here they have commiſerated my ruine, I have plentifully found, who (for the moſt generous of them) I may boldly ſay, though they have deteſted the fact, yet they have pitied the perſon delinquent; the firſt in their loyalty, the laſt in their charity; ingenuouſly confeſſing, that never any ſubject, or Peere of my rank had ever that help of Counſell, that benefit of time, or a more free and legall tryall than I have had: of the like to which none of my predeceſſors hath had ſo much favour from his Prince, ſo much ſufferance from the people; in which I comprehend the underſtanding Commons, not the many-headed monſter, Multitude: But I have offended, am ſentenced, and muſt now ſuffer death.

And for my too much confidence in my ſuppoſed wiſdom and knowledge, therein have beene the moſt deceived: For hee that is wiſe to himſelfe, and knowes by others faults to correct his own offences, to be truly wiſe is to be Secretaries to our ſelves; for it is meere folly to reveale and intimate thoughts to ſtrangers: wiſdome is the moſt precious Gem with which the mind can be adorned, and learning the moſt famous thing for which a man ought to be eſteemed, and true wiſdome teacheth us to doe well, as to ſpeake well: in the firſt I have failed, for *the wiſedome of men is fooliſhneſſe with God.*

For knowledge, it is a thing indifferent both to good and evill, but the beſt knowledge is for a man to know himſelfe;

he that doth so shall esteeme of himselfe but little, for hee considereth from whence he came, and whereto he must, he regardeth not the vaine pleasures of this life, he exalteth God, and strives to live in his feare; but he that knoweth not himselfe, is wilfull in his own wayes, unprofitable in his life, unfortunate in his death, and so am I. But the reason why I sought to attaine unto it was this: I have read that he that knoweth not that which he ought to know, is a Bruit beast amongst men: hee that knoweth more than hee ought to know, is a man amongst beasts: but hee that knoweth all that may be knowne, is a God amongst men. To this I much aspired, in this I much failed; *Vanity of vanities, al is but vanity.*

I have heard the people clamour and cry out, saying, That through my occasion the times are bad, I wish that when I am dead they may prove better: most true it is, that there is at this time a great storme impending (God in his mercy avert it.) And since it is my particular lot, like *Ionah*, to be cast into the sea, I shall thinke my life well spent, to appease Gods wrath, and satisfie the peoples malice.

O what is eloquence more than aire? fashioned with an articulate and distinct sound, when it is a speciall vertue to speake little and well, and silence is oft the best oratory; for fooles in their dumbnesse may bee accounted wise: It hath power to make a good matter seeme bad, and a bad cause appeare good: but mine was to me unprofitable, and like the Cypresse trees, which are great and tall, but altogether without fruit.

What is honour? but the first step to disquietnesse, and power is still waited on by envy. neither hath it any priviledge against infamy. It is held to be the chief part of honor, for a man to joyne to his office and calling, curtesie and affability, commiseration and pitie: for thereby he draweth to him with a kind of compulsion, the hearts of the multitude: But that was the least part of my study, which now makes me call to mind, that the greater the persons are in authority, the sooner they are catcht in any delinquencie, and their smallest crimes are striven to be made capitall; the smallest spot seemes great in the finest linnen, and the least flaw is soonest found in the richest Diamond. But high and noble

spirits finding themselves wounded, grieve not so much at their owne pain and perplexitie, as at the deriding and scoffing of their enemy: but for mine own part, though I might have many in my life, I hope to finde none in my death.

Amongst other things which pollute and contaminate the mindes of great spirits, there is none more hainous than Ambition, which is seldome unaccompanied without Avarice: Such, to possesse their ends, care not to violate the Lawes of Religion, and Reason, and to breake the bonds of Modestly and Equity, with the nearest ties of Consanguinity and Amity; of which as I have beene guilty, so I crave at Gods hands forgiveneese. It is a Maxime in Philosophy, that ambitious men can never be good Counsellors to Princes; the desire of having more is common to great Lords, and a desire of Rule a great cause of their Ruine.

My Lords, I am now the hopelesse President, may I bee to you all an happy example: For ambition devoureth gold, and drinketh blood, and climbeth so high by other mens heads, that at the length in the fall it breaketh its own neck: therefore it is better to live in humble content, than in high care and trouble: For more precious is want with honesty, than wealth with infamy: For what are we but meere vapours, which in a serene Element ascend high, and upon an instant, like Smoak, vanish into nothing: or like ships without Pilots, toss up and down upon the Seas by contrary winds and tempests. But the good husbandman thinks better of those eares of Corne which bow downe, and grow crooked, than those which are straight and upright, because he is assured to finde more store of graine in the one than in the other. This all men know, yet of this how few make use: The defect whereof must be now my pain: may my suffering prove to others profit.

For what hath now the favour of my Prince, the familiarity with my Peeres, the volubility of a tongue, the strength of my memory, my learning, or knowledge, my Honours or Offices, my power and potency, my riches and treasure (all these the especiall gifts both of Nature and Fortune) what have all these profited me? Blessings I acknowledge, though by God bestowed upon man, yet not all

of them together upon many: yet by the Divine Providence the most of them met in me: of which had I made happy use, I might still have flourisht, who now am forc't immaturely to fall.

I now could wish (but that *minus* is too late) that God with his outward goodnesse towards me had so commixed his inward grace, that I had chosen the *medium* path, neither inclining to the right hand, nor deviating to the left; but like *Icarus* with my waxen wings, fearing by too low a flight to moisten them with the waves, I soared too high, and too neare the Sunne, by which they being melted, I ayming at the highest, am precipitated to the lowest; and am made a wretched prey to the Waters: But I who before built my house upon the sand, have now setled my hopes upon the Rock my Saviour; by whose onely merits my sole trust is, that whatsoever becomes of my body, yet in his bosome my soule may be Sanctuaried.

Nimrod would have built a Tower to reach up to heaven, and call'd it *Babel*; but God turned it to the confusion of languages, and dissipation of the people. *Pharaoh* kept the Children of *Israel* in bondage, and after having freed them, in his great pride would have made them his prey; but God gave them a drie and miraculous passage, and *Pharaoh* and his hoast a watrie Sepulcher. *Belshazzar* feasted his Princes and Prostitutes, who drunke healths in the Vessells taken from the Temple, but the hand of God writ upon the wall, *Mene, Tekel, Phoras*, & that night before morning was both his Kingdome and life taken from him: Thus God lets men goe on a great while in their owne devices, but in the end it proves their own ruine and destruction, never suffering them to effect their desired purposes; therefore let none presume upon his power, glory in his greatnesse, or bee too confident in his riches: These things were written for our Instruction, of which the living may make use, the dying cannot; but wise and unfruitfull wisdome are the next neighbours to folly.

There can bee no greater vanity in the world, than to esteeme the world, which regardeth no man; and to make slight account of God, who greatly respecteth all men; and there

there can bee no greater folly in man, than by much Travell to increase his goods, and pamper his body, and in the interim with vaine delights and pleasures, to lose his soule. It is a great folly in any man to attempt a bad beginning, in hope of a good ending; and to make that proper to one, which was before common to all, is meere indiscretion, and the beginning of discord, which I positively wish may end in this my punishment.

O how small a proportion of earth will containe my body, when my high minde could not be confined within the spacious compasse of two Kingdomes! But my houre draweth on, and I conclude with the Psalmist, not ayming at any one man in particular, but speaking for all in generall: *How long will you Iudges bee corrupted? how long will yee cease to give true Iudgement? &c. Blessed is the man that doth not walke in the Councell of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornfull, therefore they shall not stand in the Iudgement, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous, &c.*

About the houre of eleven a clock the aforesaid Lord of *Strafford* was conveyed to the Scaffold on Tower-Hill, where was a Court of Guard made by the severall Companies of Souldiers of the City of *London*, and the Hamlets of the Tower on each side as he passed to the Scaffold: before marched the Marshalls men to make way, then the Sheriffes of Londons Officers with their Halberds; after them the Kings Guard, or warders of the Tower: Next came one of his Gentlemen, bare headed, in mourning Habit, the Lord *Strafford* following him clad in black cloath, with divers others in the same habit, which were his attendance; then the Lord Bishop of *Armagh*, and other good Divines, with the Sheriffes of London, and divers honourable personages.

When he came to the Scaffold, he there shewed himselfe on each side in full view to all people, and made this short speech, with as much alacrity of Spirit, as a mortall man could expresse, *viz.*

THE

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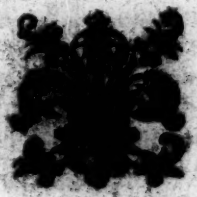
THE EARLE OF STRAFFORDS SPEECH ON THE *Scaffold* before he was beheaded on Tower-hill, the 12. of *May*, 1641.



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THE EARLE OF STRAFFORDS SPEECH ON the SCAFFOLD.

MY Lord Primate of *Ireland* (and my Lords, and the rest of these Gentlemen) it is a very great comfort to me, to have your Lordship by, and this day, in regard I have been knowne to you a long time, I should be very glad to obtain so much silence, as to be heard a few words, but I doubt I shall not; my Lord I come hither by the good will and pleasure of Almighty God, to

pay that last debt I owe to sin, which is death, and by the blessing of that God to rise againe through the merits of Christ Jesus to eternall glory; I wish I had been private, that I might have been heard; My Lord, if I might bee so much beholding to you, that I might use a few words, I should take it for a very great curtesie; My Lord, I come hither to submit to that judgement which hath past against me, I doe it with a very quiet and contented minde, I doe freely forgive all the world, a forgiveness that is not spoken from teeth outward (as they say) but from the heart; I speak it in the presence of Almighty God, before whom I stand, that there is not so much as a displeasing thought in me arising to any creature; I thanke God I may say truly, and my Conscience beares mee witnesse, that in all my services since I have had the honour to serve his Majesty in any employment, I never had any thing in my heart, but the joynt and individuall prosperity of King and People; if in have been my hap to be misconstrued, it is the common portion of us all while we are in this life, the righteous judgement is hereafter, here we are subject to errors, and apt to be misjudged one of another; there is one thing I desire to cleere my selfe of, and I am very confident, I speake it with so much clearenesse, that I hope I shall have your Christian charity in the beliefe of it, I did al-

wayes

waies ever thinke the Parliaments of England, were the happiest Constitutions that any Kingdome, or any Nation lived under, and under God the meanes of making King and People happy; so far have I been from being against Parliaments; for my death, I here acquit all the world, and pray God heartily to forgive them; and in particular, my Lord Primate, I am very glad that his Majesty is pleased to conceive me not meriting so severe, and heavy a punishment as the utmost execution of this sentence; I am very glad, and infinitely rejoyce in this mercy of his, and beseech God to turne it to him, that he may finde mercy when he hath most need of it; I wish this Kingdome all the prosperity and happinesse in the world; I did it living, and now dying it is my wish, I doe now professe it from my heart, and doe most humbly recommend it unto every man here, and wish every man to lay his hand upon his heart, and consider seriously whether the beginning of the happinesse of a People should be written in letters of Blood. I feare you are in a wrong way, and I desire Almighty God that no one drop of my Blood may rise up in judgement against you.

(My Lord,) I professe my selfe a true and obedient Son to the *Church* of *England*, to that *Church* wherein I was borne, and wherein I was bred; *prosperity* and *happinesse*, be ever to

it: and whereas it hath been said that I have enclin'd to Popery, if it be an Objection worth answering, let me say truly, that from the time since I was one and twenty yeares of age, till this houre, now going upon 49. I never had thought in my heart, to doubt of the truth of my Religion in *England*; and never any had the boldnesse to suggest to me the contrary, to the best of my remembrance; and so being reconciled to the mercies of *Christ Iesus* my Saviour, into whose bosome I hope shortly to be gather'd, to those eternall happinesses that shall never have end. I desire heartily the forgivenesse of every man, both for any rash or unadvised word, or deed, and desire your Prayers. And so my Lords farewell, farewell all the things of this world, LORD strengthen my faith, give me confidence and assurance in the merits of *Christ Iesus*. I desire you that you would be silent and joyne in Prayers with me; and I trust in GOD that we shall all meet and live eternally in Heaven, there to receive the accomplishment of all happinesse, where every teare shall be wiped from our eyes, and every sad thought from our hearts. And so God blesse this Kingdome, and *Iesus* have mercy upon my Soule.

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